

Opening Statement of Chairman Fred Upton
Health Subcommittee Hearing on “Examining Legislative Proposals to Combat our
Nation’s Drug Abuse Crisis”
October 8, 2015

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today we will discuss several important bipartisan legislative proposals aimed at addressing the drug abuse crisis that is sadly unfolding in communities in my home state of Michigan as well as across the country. These bills and this hearing build upon the solid foundation laid by the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee which has held several hearings and meetings and heard from two dozen witnesses, including from the federal government, our partners in the states, and a wide range of health professionals and addiction specialists. They spoke about the root causes as well as the consequences of our nation’s complex and growing opioid epidemic and about potential solutions.

In addition to the O&I hearings, many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle have participated in numerous discussions back home with impacted constituents and local leaders about the devastating effects this public health crisis is having on our communities. In August I participated in an event in St. Joe, Michigan, with various local leaders to discuss the devastating effects of prescription drug and heroin abuse that was gripping our community.

There were 13 suspected overdoses in Kalamazoo in the first quarter of 2013, up from 9 in the first quarter of 2012. Opiate-related overdoses have recently become the number one cause of injury related death in Michigan and nationwide. This sad reality has hit hard at home in Kalamazoo County. In 2008, we lost Amy Bousfield, 18 years old and a graduate of Portage Central High School. In 2012, Marissa King died at 21 years old. She began using heroin in 2009, despite having lost two friends to the drug, including Amy Bousfield. This crisis does not discriminate between large and small, rural and urban, rich and poor. Now it is time to take what we have learned and begin making changes to help.

We have learned that while addiction is not easy to treat, it is treatable, and we need to rise to this challenge for the sake of the American family. Mr. Botticelli sitting before the committee today is an example that this disease is beatable. He is a champion of the patient community. We thank you for your continued efforts.

I commend those of you who have worked diligently on the legislation being discussed today and I look forward to continuing to learn about and work on these various bills. As we move forward, we must harmonize our efforts with the efforts already underway at the federal and state levels, in order to take constructive and effective action, and I am committed to doing just that.